

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 1, AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009 -- (House of Representatives - February 13, 2009)

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in favor of this conference report. Our Nation's economy is foundering. We need to respond. We're in a deep and long recession. Our unemployment rate is over 7 percent, and growing. And we urgently need an economic recovery package to set the Nation on the proper course to rebound.

I am pleased the House and the Senate moved rapidly to resolve the differences between the two bills and to get this bill to the President so it can finally take action.

The final conference agreement retains provisions that were passed out of the Committee on Energy and Commerce in January in three critical areas that will accelerate economic recovery and protect American families: Broadband, energy, and health.

The first piece is an investment in expanding broadband Internet access so businesses and households in rural and other underserved areas can link to the global balance economy.

Broadband networks are as important to the Nation's economic success as the postal roads, canals, rail lines, and interstate highways of the past. Unfortunately, the United States has fallen behind other nations in terms of broadband deployment and adoption.

This legislation would authorize approximately \$4.7 billion for grants to be administered by the Commerce Department and another \$2.5 billion in grants to be administered by the Agriculture Department to put people to work building new broadband infrastructure.

The second piece we're considering is a major investment in the Nation's energy future. The conference agreement will accelerate deployment of smart grid technology throughout the country, offer loan guarantees for renewable energy and transmission projects, and promote energy efficiency throughout the country.

I am pleased that we were able to adopt these provisions. We also will support economic recovery through the creation of thousands of jobs, especially for low- and middle-income Americans, as the Nation dramatically increases the efficiency in which it uses energy and relies upon renewable sources of energy.

And the final and biggest piece involves investments in health. And there are three sections. First, the bill would help people who lose their jobs and have no health insurance. It provides temporary subsidies for COBRA premiums to enable workers who had insurance, to hold on to that insurance.

The bill would protect health insurance for an additional 7 million Americans. It will also provide an 18-month extension of the health insurance program that helps families transitioning from welfare to work to keep their Medicaid coverage.

Second, the bill would provide \$19 billion in funding to accelerate the nationwide adoption of health information technology. This will expedite the development of nationwide health information infrastructure that will enhance real-time communication between providers and improve the coordination of care.

Finally, the bill would provide \$87 billion in temporary funding to assist State Medicaid programs facing surges in caseloads and State revenue shortfalls. The bill would provide a temporary increase in the Federal Medicaid matching rate, FMAP. It balances an across-the-board increase of 6.2 percentage points, with an additional increase targeted at those States with high unemployment.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is necessary to set the course to turn the economy around and deliver on our promise and duty to assist our constituents in this difficult time. I urge my colleagues to approve the conference report.